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LARRY CRAIG

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NEWS RELEASE

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CRAIG PRAISES SENATE'S PASSAGE OF FARM BILL CONFERENCE REPORT

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Idaho Senator Larry Craig today said that all Idahoans will benefit from the new five-year farm bill conference report which passed the Senate by a vote of 81 to 15. The farm bill, formally titled the Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008, authorizes and sets the primary food and agricultural policy of the federal government.

In a statement on the Senate floor prior to this morning's vote, Craig called attention to the bill's new specialty crop title, an addition he has been negotiating for several years.

"We know that specialty crops – which include potatoes and wine and table grapes in Idaho – are about 51 percent of the gross revenue of American agriculture," Craig said. "But they have never been mentioned in our federal ag policy. In my State of Idaho, specialty crops are a big deal. Many people have heard about potatoes in Idaho. By definition, they are a specialty crop."

Craig said the farm bill advances specialty crops by enhancing their competitiveness in local markets and including them in fresh fruit and vegetable snack programs in grade schools in all States. He said the new specialty crop authorization also includes pest and disease management programs, food safety initiatives, and funding for mechanization and plant breeding programs, among others.

"This bill means we will keep our world-class edge in the area of specialty crops, aided by trade assistance and market promotion," Craig said, adding that the specialty crops provisions are substantially funded, as well as authorized.

Craig said other important farm bill provisions include conservation and the commodity programs "that create a vital safety net for our wheat, barley, peas, lentils, chickpeas, oilseeds, sugar and wool products."

"A great deal of effort also has been focused on energy and agriculture's role in that," Craig said prior to the vote. "It isn't by accident that the farm bill has a title that recognizes energy as a very valuable part of American agriculture. Transitioning dollars out of a maturing market in corn-based ethanol into cellulosic-based is a major step and a right step."

The provisions of the old farm bill have been extended multiple times last September, and Craig said Thursday's legislation was overdue to give producers and growers certainty about the nation's farm policy. He noted that crop subsidies are substantially lower in this bill and that increases in federal nutrition and food stamp programs account for two-thirds of the bill's cost.

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“In fact, today’s commodity prices are so good for farmers, most subsidies would not even be triggered today under this bill,” he said.

With the Senate’s action, the farm bill conference report, which passed the U.S. House of Representatives on Wednesday by a strong vote of 318-106, now goes to President Bush for his signature. The President has said he will veto the bill, but Craig said the Senate and the House will have the votes to override that veto.

Craig concluded, “To the White House and to our president, I would say, Mr. President, you and your people have been at the table working on this program with us for well over a year. It’s time you recognize the value of this program, what has been put into new agricultural policy, and support us in that effort.”